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WHAT IS OXFORD DOING?

OR

HINTS

TO

COLLEGE PASTORS AND TUTORS.

BY A

RESIDENT MEMBER OF THE UNIVERSITY.

OXFORD:

HENRY SLATTER, HIGH-STREET.

G. BELL, FLEET-STREET, LONDON.

1841.

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WHAT IS OXFORD DOING?

WHAT is Oxford doing? At a crisis like this, when ardent minds, wearied with the tameness and complacency of the church of former days, stand on higher though still unsafe ground; when impiety and open profligacy are discountenanced by the very fashion of society, and religion in some form or other is becoming creditable; are we not weightily concerned with the answer which those who stand in high places, and at whose guidance so mainly is God's cause, may be enabled to give to the above enquiry? Oh! that it could be given in a manner that would prove Oxford to be actuated by apostolic zeal, by a burning love for souls, by a self-denying exertion for the good of those who are perishing for lack of knowledge. Something must be done far higher and more *striking* in its import of good, than ever has been before; this, the present state of mind demands, which in very ardency of temperament will enlist under that banner where most zeal appears, be it even a bad cause. But how are we to ascertain the religious state of any society? Its spiritual improvement does not always keep pace with the im-

provement of its members' morality; hence we ought not to deem ourselves assuredly prospering, because drunkenness, swearing, and debauchery are becoming more discreditable among us; nor can we surely predicate the spiritual, and therefore only genuine, improvement of our University from the higher tone of morality therein; it is even here that Satan tempts as an angel of light; he cannot successfully attack principles which the improved system of education, and religious advantages of the present day have instilled into the minds of many; but since he fails to subvert these, he builds upon them a fabric of his own; and this being composed of good works, fastings, mortifications of the spirit and body, too often well satisfies the earnest enquirer, anxious to be doing something, which, opposed to what he sees about him, seems rather to promote the will of God. It is no less true than lamentable, that those who lay stress on such performances as meritorious in themselves, are the men of most zeal, and perhaps of most sincerity, in Oxford; small wonder that their numbers increase, since among them the pious young man can best find that sympathy and kindly conversation from his superiors, which his spirit so much needs and relishes; small wonder that he should turn with disgust from the *coldness* it may be of his own college tutors, and join those who will talk with, and advise him on religious matters. Much is it to be deplored that zeal in equal measure is not to be found elsewhere; and we must conclude, however wrong

the notions above alluded to may be, yet are they maintained with a constancy and fervour that would do infinite credit to, and ought to be deemed worthy of, those views which their opponents profess to urge and act upon. It would perhaps be well to examine briefly the quality of the foundation of the high claims advanced by our Oxford Clergy, in common with their brethren ; we fear that were the spirit and love that inflamed the Apostles to be the test of these claims, they would hardly be maintained. Far be it from the object of this pamphlet to make light of the high authority our Church gives her Ministers; nay rather setting this in its proper noble position, we would exclaim from it against the complacent supineness of some, and the unintelligent exclusiveness of others, and the position from which the exclamation is made demands attention and respect. Surely a close and stern examination into the motives and modes of our conduct is an individual duty, which has latterly assumed ten-fold importance, and by entering upon it with a temperate spirit we may succeed in getting at the truth, and consequently be best enabled in part to answer the question proposed at the commencement—What is Oxford doing? This method of conducting the enquiry will therefore prove more salutary than were we to introduce, and comment upon the unhappy questions which now harass and divide us, and which indeed would be irrelevant to a paper which proposes to hint at evils of long standing, viewed in their present baneful opera-

tion. It cannot be denied that many of the Oxford Clergy, with some justness, bear the opprobrium of spending their time, talents, and energy in reaching after church honours and emolument, at least of being ill able to make St. Paul's declaration their own; "What things *were* gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ". "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, *therewith* to be content". How sad the contrast which the spirit of our own days presents to that which breathed the above confessions!

And again, while it is true, that the necessary college duties occupy in many cases so much time, as not to allow of very constant visiting among the sick, and searching out in order to relieve distress; yet surely St. Paul's charge might be followed more closely than it is. "Preach the word"; what more? "Be instant in season, out of season". We might adduce many passages to prove the great endurance and zeal of the first preachers; we might go through the whole of their travels and labours, their patient sufferance of multiform hardships in the prosecution of their Master's will—the salvation of a ruined world; and we might still bring the line to measure the conduct of their spiritual sons; but the task would be ungracious, for in how many instances would the line which ran straight along the Apostle's path shew the lamentable obliquity of course pursued by these successors. We should find in the progress of our enquiry, not the appeal —"Lo we have left all and followed thee"; but

in very many instances the grasp after secular power and worldly emolument, the thirst for applause, the coincidence of opinion, feeling and pursuit, with the maxims and tastes of the men of this world. We should have to lament the discrepancy between the creed and conduct of many who, though they have professed to deny themselves, to renounce the pomps and vanities of the world, and to become the humble followers of the meek and lowly Jesus, who have solemnly declared their belief in a divine call to preach the gospel of the grace of God—are yet comforting themselves in sloth and ease, or the acquirement of worldly wisdom for the attainment of worldly honours. But there is another very important point that demands our serious and calm reflection as more immediately concerning the general system of Oxford education and training. Are not most of our college authorities verily guilty of not practically concerning themselves about the religious feelings and opinions of the young men committed to their care? Startling is the fact that while all other matters with most becoming strictness are attended to, this is omitted. Seldom are the young men visited by the clergy of their own college; there may be a sorrowing soul that needs comfort and advice, but they under whose charge this soul is know it not. Where is the encouragement given to those who may be struggling on amid many difficulties, wavering between good and evil, and haply inclining to the former? This is an omission that surely demands serious consideration

and amendment; it would appear that more liberal communication should be held *out* of the lecture room, and that the distant reserve, at present so studiously and successfully maintained, should be done away with; that there ought not to be so much calculation on authority being lessened by such conduct, as on the greater good that would hence most probably accrue. Each college might, and indeed should be considered as a *parish*, containing within it a *cure of souls*, this being the main distinction between the two; that in the former there are more workmen to gain a more important end among a less number of persons. But so far from the comparison being practically just as matters stand now, it is really quite an *event* for a tutor to visit an undergraduate's rooms; we might argue even on the impolicy of such procedure as affecting hearty perseverance in study, for it is certain that the majority of undergraduates would feel their tutors' notice and friendly advice as an additional incentive to perseverance rather than an apology for disrespect. The youth, who has perhaps had the favour and special attention of his master at school, allows the energies there exerted to deaden under the comparative unconcern of his college tutors; an unconcern, the ill effects of which cannot be counterbalanced by the real excellence of their lectures. It is true that access at any time *may* be obtained to them; but the little natural inclination there would ordinarily exist to this course must at present be entirely destroyed by the stern and

forbidding demeanour above remarked upon. But far above these considerations is the one that by such conduct all enforcement of practical lessons of piety either in or out of the lecture room is excluded. It would not seem very difficult or out of place to intersperse even the common lectures of the day with salutary hints on subjects which though foreign to the lecture might prove of chiefest import. But however this may be, why should it be deemed a strange thing for an ordained minister of God to assemble those who are religiously inclined for advice and prayer? Surely the being engaged in aught beside cannot excuse a man from the requirements of the solemn commission he received at his ordination. "Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands. Whose sins thou dost forgive they are forgiven; and whose sins thou dost retain they are retained: and be thou a faithful dispenser of the Word of God, and of his Holy Sacraments; in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost". If each minister believes that he receives at his ordination "the Holy Ghost," and that too "for the office and work of a priest," is it not a mockery of God not fully to perform that office and work? Moreover as to the charge he receives from the bishop, that "as a watchman, messenger, and steward of the Lord, he should teach, premonish, feed and provide for the Lord's family"; unless some exception under peculiar cir-

cumstances can be gathered from this commission and charge, and unless members of a college may be excluded from the Lord's family to be premonished, fed, and provided for, very far from the above mentioned procedure being strange, its omission is culpable in the highest degree. We could not however more vividly shew this than by further contrasting the following solemn words of the bishop in the ordering of priests with the conduct of some who were once admonished by the same. "Have always printed in your remembrance how great a treasure is committed to your charge. For they are the sheep of Christ which he bought with his death, and for whom he shed his blood. The Church and congregation whom you must serve is his spouse, and his body. And if it shall happen the same Church, or any member thereof, to take any hurt or hindrance by reason of your negligence, ye know the greatness of the fault, and also the horrible punishment that will ensue. Wherefore consider with yourselves the end of your ministry towards the children of God, towards the spouse and body of Christ, and see that you never cease your labour, your care, and your diligence, until you have done all that lieth in you, according to your bounden duty, to bring all such as are or shall be committed to your charge, unto that agreement and faith in the knowledge of God, and to that ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ, that there be no place left among you either for error in religion, or for viciousness in life." And in order that all this may be ac-

complished, and the Scriptures moreover carefully studied and faithfully preached, the charge thus speaks at its close, "for this self-same cause ye ought to forsake and set aside (as much as you may) all worldly cares and studies." No comments are needed upon this solemn admonition, the bare quotation of it should serve to impress all concerned with feelings of the deepest awe and responsibility. But how can we expect other duties to be attended to, when in some cases even the grand and special authority to preach the Word of God is almost entirely slighted! What shall we say to these plain unexaggerated statements of truth, and what must be thought of a system of training which, neglecting concerns of the most vital importance, withholds a check to the headstrong passions of some young men, and to the naturally warping tendency of classical studies in the case of others? With respect to such studies, there is not sufficient consideration *beyond* the class schools; for these is labour encouraged and bestowed; for these alone is health often destroyed and vigour of mind impaired, and thus the capability for general usefulness seriously damaged. If instead of the ready complaints that are made about the comparative neglect of divinity in our schools, tutors were to mingle with their classical instruction lessons of practical piety, to encourage meetings among the young men for reading the bible, and for enquiry into religious subjects, there would be found little cause to lament the scantiness of religious feeling and exertion among our best

scholars; nay, these are the very men, who from their necessary steadiness of conduct would be the first to accord with any such plan as this, and hence would a grateful alleviation be found from intense study, and small comparison would there be between present and former labour and success. It is very far from cant to say that devotion aids study; doubtless if prayer and other religious exercises were more fervent and general, the first and least benefit thereupon would be—a greater renown to Oxford for achievements in mere learning than ever before. Under these circumstances we ought not to start at the mention of innovation or change, however pleasant the system may seem under which we have been educated and remain; it is indeed well nigh impossible to avoid a partiality for whatever we have been long conversant with, but this too often leads to a limitation of view, and exclusiveness of feeling, especially when we have derived our opinions from men of acknowledged talent and goodness. But to whom is it that these well-meaning remarks are being directed? Not to Oxford in the Charles's reign; not to a monastery of lazy or bigoted monks who dread and refuse any innovation upon the ease and supremacy wherein they have so long comforted themselves, and exercised the parts of tyrants; but to gentlemen of high and illustrious talent, of more generosity and liberality of feeling than ever of old; to christian ministers, in whose hands is the tremendous charge of thousands

of future heralds of salvation; on whose abundance or lack of exertion a future generation's prosperity or adversity, yea the stability or fall of a kingdom may greatly depend; for how are we not about to be influenced as a nation by the correspondence of religious knowledge and practice with the capability given us of securing the same! To men such as these, the palpable and amendable errors that have so long existed in this University must have appeared, and there only needs a grand individual exertion, a steady determination of breaking through ill customs though long established, and great good will undoubtedly accrue. It does not require extensive co-operation, to effect extensive good; we feel proud in the consciousness that many a noble instance might be adduced, as testimony to the truth of this observation.

Not for the sake of complaining have these few remarks been made, but from a true and heartfelt desire that in noticing omissions, such amendments may be adopted, as may be practically applied to the benefit of our University, and to the honour of the King of Zion.

THE END.

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